

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For additional information:

Please contact the Joint Information Center at 970-812-3351

August 12, 2015

7:00 p.m.

Update on Local Response to Gold King Mine Impact to La Plata County – Irrigation Ditches to be Flushed

Durango, CO –La Plata County, San Juan Basin Health Department and City of Durango are assisting the EPA by staffing the Call Center and providing GIS mapping of properties that have domestic water wells. There were a total of 54 residential water well samples taken through yesterday and a total of 24 private water wells will be sampled today. Individual well owners will be contacted directly as their results are completed, to be followed by written correspondence with validated results.

EPA technicians took 19 sediment samples yesterday and shipped 11 of those samples for testing yesterday, and 8 were sent overnight to labs today, because they were taken after the shipping deadline. Validated results are expected by Sunday. In addition, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has collected their own sediment samples and anticipates preliminary results tomorrow. Sheriff Smith, in consultation with all partner agencies stated, “Although we are all in agreement about the water quality results being back to pre-event levels, it is only prudent that we wait to have sediment testing results to ensure public safety prior to opening the river to recreation.”

This evening, EPA officials will work with La Plata County Director of Emergency Management Butch Knowlton and ditch operators to inspect and flush out select irrigation ditches as a measured step towards opening irrigation for farmers and ranchers who depend on Animas River water for their crops and livestock. “I expect to see a slight temporary change in color of the Animas River as a result of the ditch flushing,” said Knowlton. A plan to open and flush remaining ditches is being developed dependent upon results of this initial flush. Operators of ditches that take water from the Animas River are asked to call the Call Center at 970-385-8700 (open from 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.) and provide their name and phone numbers so officials can coordinate opening of River head gates. Individual water users are asked to keep their gates closed until notified.

Despite the opening of the ditches, owners of livestock are cautioned against allowing livestock watering at this time. Butch Knowlton has requested additional involvement from veterinary science experts from national, state, and local levels to help address concerns that residents have expressed about their livestock. Topics to be addressed are concerns surrounding animals drinking from contaminated irrigation ditches, canals and the river.

“We are pleased that the community and our local, state and federal partners are taking these steps to bring our irrigation back online for our farmers and ranchers,” said Liane Jollon, San Juan Basin Health Director. “Based on the test results to date, the flowing water has returned to pre-incident levels.”

EPA launched a new website for the incident at <http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine>. CDPHE also has a webpage for the incident at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/animas-river-spill>.

Incident information is also posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/LaPlataCounty and <http://www.facebook.com/sanjuanbasinhealth>. La Plata County has set up a call center for questions from citizens at 970-385-8700, open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

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